SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION TASK FORCE

October 15, 2003
Marco Island

AVIAN ECOLOGY WORKSHOPS:
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

FIRST WORKSHOP

The first Avian Ecology Workshop, held on March 17-18, 2003, set the stage for integrating existing scientific information on avian species typical of the Everglades with management decisions that will be necessary as the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan is implemented. Four focal species were chosen, based on their different habitat needs: the wood stork, Everglade snail kite, Cape Sable seaside sparrow, and roseate spoonbill. The Panel and presenters were asked to focus on the following key issues:

- Are there trade-offs or potential conflicts among the management needs of the four species? If so, under what conditions are they likely to occur and how can they be ameliorated?
- Restoration will change the landscape. In this transition to a more natural ecosystem, will some species be more vulnerable, others more resilient?
- How good is our information, and what other information is needed?

The Panel heard 34 scientific presentations by researchers actively working on the focal species, read relevant scientific publications and reports, and engaged in active discussion with researchers and among themselves. The Panel concluded that the best available information on the focal species is "detailed, comprehensive, and of high quality." The Panel further concluded that restoring flows through the south Florida ecosystem will benefit all of the focal species. This is not to say that uncertainty does not exist during the transition; however, the Panel strongly endorsed adaptive management as the means through which to address this uncertainty.

SECOND WORKSHOP

The second Avian Ecology Workshop, held on July 29, 2003, completed the integration of science and management by allowing managers, policy makers, and other interested groups an opportunity to ask key questions to the Panel. A total of 13 questions were posed; these and the Panel's responses are summarized in the Scientific Panel Report II. The following is a synopsis of the major conclusions and recommendations.

Overall conclusions

- Sufficient information exists to proceed with the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) because the major difficulties for the species will be alleviated by CERP.
- Application of adaptive management is key to reducing the uncertainties that exist in south Florida ecosystem restoration. The Monitoring and Assessment Plan provides a good basis for addressing these issues.

- The Cape Sable seaside sparrow population is more likely to decline in the short term during the implementation of CERP; however, the approaches and research suggested by the Panel do not imply a single-species management approach.
- The linkage between hydrology and vegetation "badly needs attention." Another key area is the dynamics of fishes and the aquatic invertebrate community in relation to hydrology.
- Although the focal species are overall good indicators, some may not be responsive to short-term changes. One species that might be included for additional consideration is the white ibis.

Specific recommendations

Cape Sable seaside sparrow

- The Cape Sable seaside sparrow is the least resilient of the four focal species.
- A key issue for managers and policy makers is to be able to predict, evaluate, and manage for the potential decline within the context of recovery. Thus, population viability analysis (PVA), risk assessments, and supporting research will provide valuable information that is needed in the short- to mid-term.

Wood stork, Everglade snail kite, and roseate spoonbill

- These species are more resilient than is the Cape Sable seaside sparrow.
- Studies on the relationship for strongly mobile species that use the Everglades and areas outside the Everglades would be fruitful in that it would provide important information for interpreting the causes of changes in abundance, distribution, reproduction, and other demographic factors.
- Predicting population response for the wood stork and roseate spoonbill would be useful, but not essential to proceed with restoration.
- Only if there were a widespread and significant change in snail kites would changes in management be warranted.